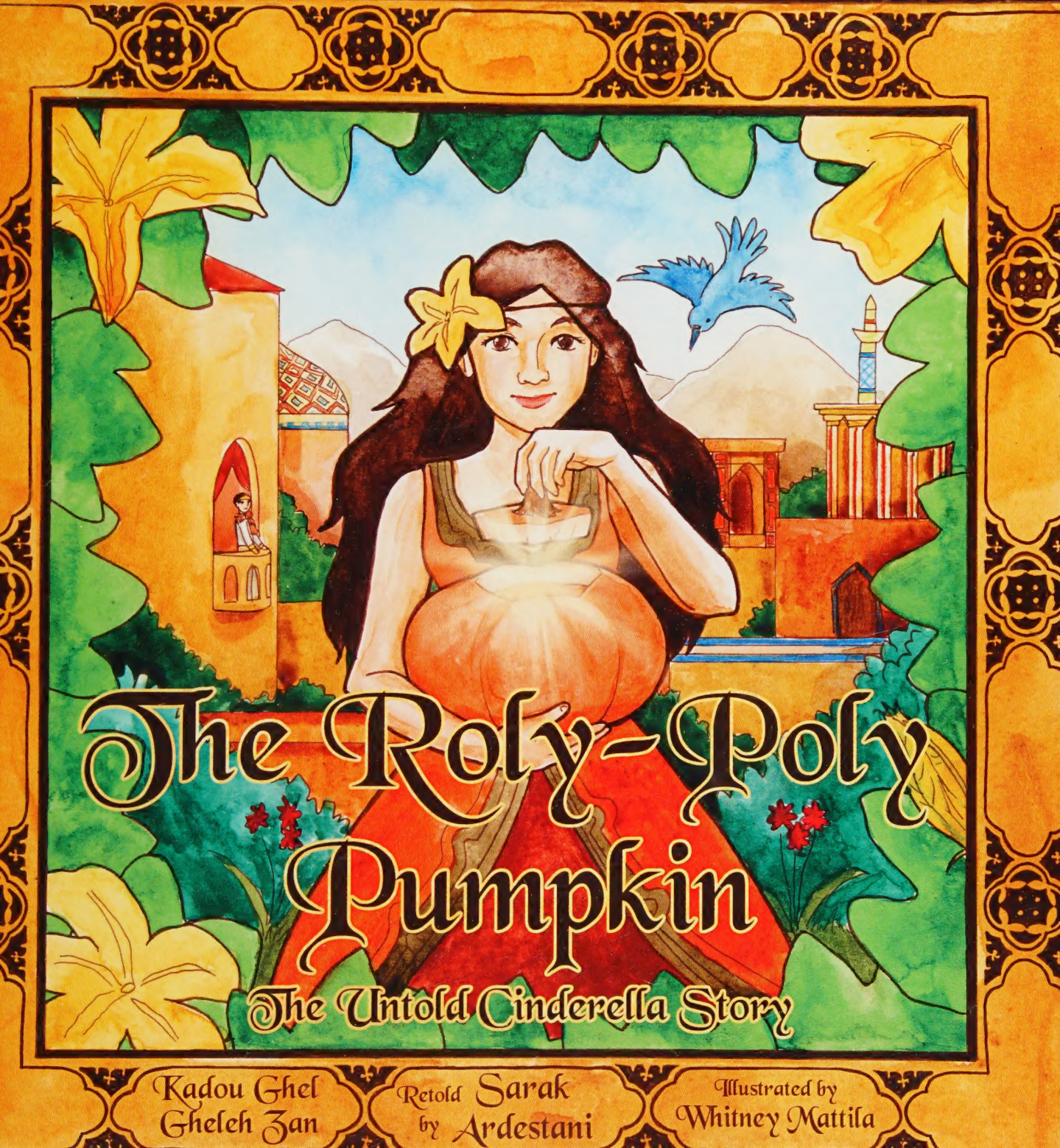
The Roly-Poly Pumpkin
The Untold Cinderella Story
Kadou Ghel Gheleh Zan
Retold by Sarak Ardestani
Illustrated by Whitney Mattila

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Dear Sudi,
Let your light shine!
V, Sarak

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to my husband Michael Passante, my uncle Ali Ardestani, and my Farsi teachers Shahantadj Deyhimi and Shahla Shahbandeh – my greatest supporters of this endeavor.

FOREWORD

The Roly-Poly Pumpkin is based on the classic Persian fairy tale *Kadou Ghel Gheleh Zan* (کدو قل قله زن). Readers may notice similarities between this tale and the traditional tales of both *Cinderella* and *Little Red Riding Hood*.

Kadou Ghel Gheleh Zan was passed down orally in the Farsi language through the generations for at least 200 years, although its exact origins are not well-documented. This book retells the original Farsi story in English, while keeping true to the original story in most major aspects.

The modern version of this story commonly told in Iran only covers the second half of this book (pages 18-27). The first half of this book, which is monarchy-centric, is no longer being widely published (pages 2-17). This omission is what makes *The Roly-Poly Pumpkin* the "Untold Cinderella Story." The more complete fairy tale in this book can therefore be considered the "older" edition of *Kadou Ghel Gheleh Zan*.

Another important difference is that in the modern version of *Kadou Ghel Gheleh Zan*, the second half is no longer the tale of the mother going to visit her daughter, the princess, and her husband, the prince, at the palace. It is now simply a story of a mother going to visit her daughter and son-in-law at their house.

Once upon a time, in a land far away, lived a loving lady who wanted a baby. After wishing for a very long time, she and her husband *still* did not have a baby. The lady cried, "I want a child, even if it looks like a pumpkin!"

A little while later, she became pregnant and gave birth to a pumpkin! The surprised parents welcomed their child with open hearts.

Year after year, the pumpkin grew until it was time to go to school. It did not like going to school. The schoolchildren always made fun of the pumpkin for looking so different. They yelled, "You're round, orange, and squishy!"

Across from the school was the royal palace. In the palace lived a prince. The prince loved to gaze from the palace at the animals and trees around him. One day, a bluebird caught his eye. He watched it fly over to the school, and then noticed the pumpkin playing in the schoolyard. Amazed, the prince watched the pumpkin roll and bounce.

Suddenly, he saw a beautiful girl step out of the pumpkin to pick some grapes. Smiling, she fed a few grapes to the hungry bluebird and stepped back into the pumpkin.

As the prince watched the beauty, he sighed and said, "I'm in love with the Roly-Poly Pumpkin." The prince quickly wondered, "How will my mother let me marry a pumpkin?"

The next day, the prince went to the schoolyard and waited for the Roly-Poly Pumpkin to come out. After the school bell rang, the pumpkin rolled outside. This time, when the girl came out of the pumpkin, the prince greeted her with a shy smile and a sparkling ring. The girl could feel the warmth of the prince's heart. He asked for her hand, and slipped the ring onto her finger.

The ring was the perfect size.

The prince cut some grapes for the girl, kissed her hand, and said, "One day, this ring will be yours." He then took back the ring and skipped home to the palace.

When the prince reached the palace, he told his mother, the queen, "I only want a bride whose finger fits this ring."

The queen immediately called her lady from the court and told her, "Go bring the girl whose finger fits this ring."

The court lady and the king's men marched to every house throughout the land. They knocked on doors and tried the ring on countless fingers. They could not find any girl whose finger fit the ring.

Tired from searching, the group finally reached the house of the Roly-Poly Pumpkin. The king's men asked the pumpkin's mother if a girl lived there.

The mother replied, "Well, I have a pumpkin, but I don't know if it's a boy or a girl."

The court lady said, "Bring us the pumpkin, and we'll see for ourselves."

Led by her mother, the pumpkin rolled into the room. The king's men stood there and laughed at the Roly-Poly Pumpkin. The court lady shouted, "We're looking for a *girl* whose finger fits this ring – not a *pumpkin*!"

While they were still laughing, one of the king's men held out the ring to the pumpkin and said, "Let me see your hand."

The room was silent. Slowly, a beautiful and delicate hand reached out of the pumpkin. The mother shouted happily, "I have a girl!"

The king's man placed the ring on her finger – it was a perfect fit! The good news quickly reached the palace and spread throughout the land.

Back at the palace, the queen asked her son, "You want to marry a pumpkin?" The prince nodded yes – knowing that inside the pumpkin was the beautiful girl he loved.

A few days later, the prince and the Roly-Poly Pumpkin were married. At the wedding ball, the prince reached for the Roly-Poly Pumpkin's hand and whispered, "It's time for the real you to shine."

Seeing the love in his eyes, the girl stepped out of the pumpkin. A bright light filled the room. Everyone was shocked to see the girl appear. They soon jumped for joy and danced in celebration!

The prince and now princess lived happily together.

From time to time, the princess' mother would visit. On one of her trips to the palace, the mother saw a lion in the woods! The lion leapt in front of her and yelled, "I'm hungry, and I'm going to eat you right now!"

The loving lady begged, "I'm just skin and bones – don't eat me! Let me go to my daughter's house to eat and get fat. You can eat me when I return." The lion agreed.

The mother continued on her way until she ran into a wolf! The wolf wanted to eat her, too.

She told the wolf, "I'm just skin and bones – don't eat me! Let me go to my daughter's house to eat and get fat, and you can eat me when I return." The wolf agreed.

The mother hurried along the path. Suddenly, she ran into a monster with horns on his head! She cried to the monster, "I'm just skin and bones – don't eat me! Let me go to my daughter's house to eat and get fat, and you can eat me when I return." The monster agreed.

With the monster far behind her, the mother finally reached the palace. She ate, slept well, and enjoyed her time with her daughter and the prince.

When the mother was leaving, she stood at the door and froze in fear. The princess asked, "What's wrong, Mother?"

Her mother explained the danger in the woods. The concerned princess replied, "Don't worry, I'll help you."

She went and brought her pumpkin and told her mother, "Jump into this pumpkin. It will protect you! Roll all the way home, and take a fistful of dirt, too – you'll need it."

The mother grabbed some dirt with her hand and jumped inside the pumpkin. The daughter gave the pumpkin a big push, and it rolled down the path home.

Whitney Mattila

Once the mother rolled deep into the woods, the monster stopped the pumpkin! The monster said, "Ro-o-o-ly one, Po-o-o-ly one, have you seen a bent-over old lady?'

The mother hidden in the pumpkin replied, "I promise by the horns on your head, I have not seen her. Roll me, release me, and let me go – I have things to do!"

The monster rolled her. She went rolling down the path until she bumped into the growling wolf!

The wolf asked, "Ro-o-o-ly one, Po-o-o-ly one, have you seen the bent-over old lady?"

The mother hidden in the pumpkin replied, "I promise by the razor sharp teeth in your mouth, I have not seen her. Roll me, release me, and let me go – I have things to do!"

The wolf rolled her, and she went down the path until she ran into the lion.

The lion asked her, "Ro-o-o-ly one, Po-o-o-ly one, have you seen the bent-over old lady?" The mother hidden in the pumpkin replied, "I promise by your huge claws, I have not seen her. Roll me, release me, and let me go – I have things to do!"

The lion did not believe her. He picked up the pumpkin and threw it on the ground! The pumpkin burst open, and the lion jumped onto the lady.

The mother quickly threw her fistful of dirt into the lion's eyes!

She escaped from the lion's claws and hurried home safely.

When the pumpkin broke open, not only was the mother set free, but so was the light inside the pumpkin. The light filled the sky and spread throughout the kingdom. The danger in the woods disappeared too, and everyone in the land lived happily ever after.

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarak Ardestani, the daughter of Iranian-American parents, was born and raised in Virginia. She heard her first Persian fairy tale as a bedtime story at the age of six. Her Uncle Ali narrated the tales and planted the seeds for what later became this book.

Sarak earned her B.A. in English at the University of Mary Washington. She lives and works in Washington, DC. Her goal is to give new life to traditional Persian fairy tales and share them with the English-speaking world.

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